Without consideration for any doctrinal points of view, theological implications or consensus, based solely upon all of the possible lexical and grammatical constructs that might be allowable, would the Greek grammar and vocabulary allow for Matthew 25:46 to be translated: “And these shall depart towards the punishment pertaining to the age: but the righteous towards the life pertaining to the age.”

Based on my comprehensive research into the Greek grammar, lexicography, and scholarly analysis of Matthew 25:46, I can now provide a thorough answer to your question.

Grammatical and Lexical Allowability of the Proposed Translation

Answer: Yes, with Important Qualifications

The Greek grammar and vocabulary of Matthew 25:46 **do allow** for the translation "And these shall depart towards the punishment pertaining to the age: but the righteous towards the life pertaining to the age," based strictly on lexical and grammatical possibilities, **without** consideration of theological consensus or doctrinal implications.

Detailed Linguistic Analysis

Greek Text

καὶ ἀπελεύσονται οὗτοι εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον, οἱ δὲ δίκαιοι εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον

Component-by-Component Examination

1. εἰς (eis) - "Towards"

The preposition **εἰς** governing the accusative case has the following lexical range:[1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

- **Primary meanings**: "into, to, toward, for, among"
- **Directional force**: Always prospective (forward-looking), never retrospective

- **Semantic function**: "An indicator of direction toward a goal, not as an indicator of location without direction" [1]
- **Classification**: Goal-oriented term expressing movement, entrance, direction, purpose, or result

Your proposed "towards" is lexically valid and captures the directional aspect of εἰς. The preposition can legitimately be rendered "toward" as it indicates motion in the direction of an object. [2] [6]

2. κόλασις (kolasis) - "Punishment"

The noun **κόλασις** (accusative: κόλασιν) appears only twice in the New Testament (Matthew 25:46 and 1 John 4:18): [7] [8]

Etymology and Classical Usage:

- Derived from the verb **κολάζω (kolazō)**, originally meaning "to prune trees" or "to cut back" (particularly almond trees) [9] [10]
- In classical Greek usage, distinguished from **τιμωρία (timōria)** [8] [11] [12]
  - **Timōria**: Retributive punishment that satisfies the inflicter's sense of outraged justice
  - **Kolasis**: Corrective punishment intended for the bettering and reformation of the offender

Key Classical Sources:

- **Plato** (*Protagoras* 323E): "No one punishes (kolazei) simply because he has done wrong—that would be to take unreasonable vengeance (timoreitai). We punish (kolazei) a wrong-doer in order that he may not do wrong again" [12]
- **Clement of Alexandria**: Defined kolasis as "pure discipline" and timoria as "the return of evil for evil" [12]
- **Aristotle**: Distinguished kolasis (corrective) from timoria (retributive) [11]
- **Aulus Gellius**: "Kolasis is given that a man may be corrected; timoria is given that dignity and authority may be vindicated" [12]

Lexical Analysis:
While "punishment" remains the standard translation, the classical background and semantic range of kolasis means that **"correction," "chastening," or "discipline"** are lexically defensible based on the word's historical usage and etymological roots. However, your proposed translation uses "punishment," which is entirely appropriate. [10] [9] [7] [8] [11]

3. αἰώνιος (aionios) - "Pertaining to the Age"

This is the most critical component for your question. **αἰώνιος** is the adjectival form of **αἰών (aiōn)**, meaning "age."

Lexical Data:

The noun **αἰών (aiōn)**: [13] [14]

- **Primary meaning**: "An age," "a period of time" with beginning and end
- **Semantic range**: "A space of time, an age; by extension, perpetuity; by implication, the world"
- **Biblical usage**: The New Testament speaks of multiple distinct ages (aions):
  - "The present wicked eon" (Gal 1:4)
  - "The coming eon" (Matt 10:30; Luke 18:30)
  - "The oncoming eons" (Eph 2:7)
  - "The conclusion of the eon" (Matt 13:39-40)
  - "The secret concealed from the eons" (Eph 3:9)[15]

Critical Linguistic Principle:
Grammar dictates that **an adjective cannot take on greater force than its noun form**. Since aiōn demonstrably refers to periods with beginnings and ends (as evidenced by phrases like "the conclusion of the aion"), the adjective aionios must be understood within this semantic framework.[16] [15]

Adjectival Form αἰώνιος:

The adjective **αἰώνιος** occurs 71 times in the New Testament:[17] [18]

Lexical Range:

1. **"Age-long," "pertaining to an age," "of the age"** [19] [20] [14] [15] [10]
   - This represents the literal derivation from the noun aiōn
   - Multiple lexicographers define it this way
2. **"Eternal" or "everlasting"** in certain contexts[21] [22] [17]
   - Particularly when referring to God, whose nature sets the standard for what is called aionios
   - When coupled with **χρόνος (chronos, "time")**, it cannot mean "eternal" but rather "long ages" [23] [22]
3. **"Long-lasting," "perpetual," "enduring"**
   - An intermediate semantic position emphasizing extended but not necessarily infinite duration

Distinction from True "Eternal":
Greek possesses a separate word for genuinely eternal/everlasting duration: **ἀΐδιος (aidios)**, used only twice in the New Testament (Romans 1:20; Jude 1:6). The New Testament writers consistently chose **aionios** rather than **aidios** when discussing human destiny, judgment, and eschatological realities, suggesting a distinction in meaning.[24] [25]

Scholarly Observations on Aionios:

1. **Denominal Adjective Rule**: As a denominal adjective (adjective derived directly from a noun), aionios "must remain faithful to its root noun". The adjective cannot inflate beyond the scope of its root or "it cease[s] to be [an] adjective altogether".[16]

2. **Contextual Variation**: The meaning of aionios varies "depending upon which noun it qualifies". The noun helps determine the precise force of the adjective. An "everlasting change" or "everlasting correction" would be "a temporal process of limited duration that terminates in an irreversible state," not an unending process.[22] [9]
3. **Septuagint Usage**: In the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), aionios translates the Hebrew **עוֹלָם (olam)**, which similarly means "age," "long duration," or "hidden time" with flexible semantic range depending on context. The Septuagint usage demonstrates that aionios can refer to limited durations (e.g., Leviticus 25:46 regarding slavery lasting a lifetime, not eternity).[26] [27] [25] [21]
4. **Moulton and Milligan**: "In general, the word [aiónios] depicts that of which the horizon is not in view, whether the horizon be at an infinite distance . . . or whether it lies no farther than the span of a Caesar's life".[28]

Translation Precedents:

Multiple established translations render αἰώνιος in Matthew 25:46 with age-related terminology rather than "eternal":[29] [30] [31] [32] [33] [15]

- **Young's Literal Translation** (Baker Book House): "punishment age-during" and "life age-during"[30] [34]
- **Rotherham's Emphasized Bible** (Kregel Publishers): "age-abiding correction" and "age-abiding life"[32] [29]
- **David Bentley Hart's New Testament** (2017): "chastening of that Age" and "life of that Age"[35] [36] [37]
- **Concordant Literal Translation**: "chastening eonian" and "life eonian"[31] [38]
- **Weymouth New Testament** (1910): "Punishment of the Ages" and "Life of the Ages"[23]

Over a dozen English translations do not contain the concept of "eternal punishment" or "everlasting punishment".[15] [31]

Grammatical Construction Analysis

Adjective-Noun Agreement:
In Matthew 25:46, both κόλασιν and αἰώνιον are in the **accusative case, feminine gender, singular number**. This demonstrates proper grammatical agreement between the noun and its modifying adjective, as required in Greek.[39] [40] [41] [15]

"Pertaining to" as Translation Choice:

Your translation uses **"pertaining to the age"** rather than simply "age-long" or "of the age." This raises the question: Can an adjective be legitimately translated with a "pertaining to" construction?

Analysis:

1. **Genitive-like Force**: While αἰώνιος is grammatically an adjective (not a genitive noun), adjectives derived from nouns often carry a genitive-like descriptive force. The genitive

case is described as "the case of description" that "specifies or qualifies the word it modifies".[42] [43] [44]

2. **Descriptive Function**: The adjective aionios functions to describe or characterize the nouns it modifies (kolasis and zōē) in relation to the age (aiōn). This relational quality can legitimately be expressed as "pertaining to".[43]
3. **Lexicographical Support**: The BDAG lexicon itself uses "pertaining to" language in defining aionios: "pertaining to a period of unending duration". While BDAG applies this to infinite duration, the grammatical construction of "pertaining to [noun]" is lexicographically established for adjectival definitions.[45]
4. **Semantic Equivalence**: Translations like "age-pertaining," "of the age," or "pertaining to the age" all express the same basic relationship between the adjective and its root noun—they capture the idea that the punishment and life are characterized by or belong to a particular age or era.

Conclusion on "Pertaining to": This construction is grammatically and lexically allowable. It accurately reflects the denominal nature of aionios and makes explicit the relationship between the adjective and its root noun aiōn.

Alternative Interpretations and Scholarly Discussion

Thomas Talbott's Analysis

New Testament scholar Thomas Talbott (Willamette University) argues that the meaning of aionios in Matthew 25:46 must be understood through the lens of how adjectives function:[9]

> "Whatever its correct translation, 'aionios' is clearly an adjective and must therefore function like an adjective, and it is the very nature of an adjective for its meaning to vary, sometimes greatly, depending upon which noun it qualifies."

He provides the example that an "everlasting struggle" would be unending, but an "everlasting correction" would be "a temporal process of limited duration that terminates in an irreversible state of being rightly related to God". The noun itself (whether an end like zōē/life or a means like kolasis/punishment) influences the force of the adjective.[9]

David Bentley Hart's Position

In his 2017 translation and subsequent theological writings, Hart renders Matthew 25:46 as "chastening of that Age" and "life of that Age". He argues:[46] [37] [35]

- Aionios typically does not refer to temporal processes of unending duration in the New Testament[33] [9]
- When referring to God or divine actions, aionios is "eternal in the secondary sense that their causal source lies in the eternal character and purpose of God"[22] [9]
- The fire that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah is called "eternal fire" (Jude 7), yet it clearly does not burn endlessly—it is eternal in the sense that it expresses God's eternal character and judgment[9]

Hart's translation received substantive engagement (both positive and critical) from biblical scholars, indicating it represents a serious scholarly position rather than merely idiosyncratic interpretation.[47]

Grammatical Observations from Classical and Koine Usage

Plato and Aristotle: Both used aiōn and aionios to refer to **limited durations** as well as the life-spans of mortals. When these philosophers wanted to express true immortality or timelessness regarding the gods, they used **aidios**, not aionios.[14] [25] [19] [24] [22]

Herodian: Used aionios to describe **periodical games**—clearly limited, recurring events.[25]

New Testament Usage: When Paul speaks of "a mystery kept secret for long ages (chronois aioniois) but now disclosed" (Romans 16:25-26), aionios cannot mean "eternal" because the mystery has now been revealed. This demonstrates that aionios can refer to extended but finite periods.[23] [22] [9]

Linguistic Summary

What the Grammar Allows

Based solely on lexical range and grammatical constructs, **without theological or doctrinal considerations**, your proposed translation is allowable:

1. **εἰς**: Can legitimately be translated "towards" (directional preposition)
2. **κόλασιν**: "Punishment" is standard and appropriate
3. **αἰώνιον**: Can legitimately be understood as "pertaining to the age," "age-long," or "of the age"
    - The adjective derives from aiōn (age)
    - Grammar requires adjectives not exceed their root noun in force
    - Multiple scholarly translations use age-related terminology
    - Septuagint usage of aionios for olam demonstrates semantic flexibility
    - Classical Greek usage supports limited duration meanings

Grammatical Qualifications

1. **Majority Translation**: The predominant scholarly and ecclesiastical translation has been "eternal" or "everlasting," particularly in Western Christianity since Augustine. This reflects interpretive tradition rather than exclusive grammatical necessity.[48]
2. **Contextual Determination**: Like many Greek words, aionios has a **semantic range**. Context determines which meaning applies. Arguments about Matthew 25:46 thus involve **interpretive judgments** about context and authorial intent, not merely lexical possibilities.[49] [50]

3. **Adjective-Noun Relationship**: While grammatically an adjective modifying a noun, the semantic force can be expressed through constructions like "pertaining to" that make explicit the relationship to the root noun.[44] [43] [45]

Translation Philosophy

Your proposed translation reflects a **formal equivalence** approach that prioritizes:

- Etymological rootedness (aionios from aiōn)
- Grammatical relationship between noun and adjective
- Semantic range documented in classical and Koine Greek
- Precedent in literal translations (Young's, Rotherham's, Concordant)

Traditional translations like "eternal punishment" reflect a **dynamic equivalence** approach emphasizing:

- Theological interpretation of eschatological context
- Assumed authorial intent regarding final judgment
- Ecclesiastical tradition
- Perceived force of the parallelism with "eternal life"

Conclusion

Yes, the Greek grammar and vocabulary of Matthew 25:46 **do allow** for your proposed translation: **"And these shall depart towards the punishment pertaining to the age: but the righteous towards the life pertaining to the age."**

This translation is:

1. **Lexically defensible**: Each component (εἰς as "towards," κόλασις as "punishment," αἰώνιος as "pertaining to the age") falls within established lexical ranges[4] [17] [13] [10] [2] [14] [15] [1]
2. **Grammatically sound**: The construction properly reflects accusative case agreement and adjectival modification[40] [41] [39]
3. **Historically precedented**: Multiple published translations use similar age-related renderings[29] [30] [31] [32] [15]
4. **Etymologically justified**: The translation honors the denominal nature of aionios and its derivation from aiōn[14] [25] [16]

The fact that this translation differs from the majority ecclesiastical tradition does not render it grammatically or lexically impermissible. Greek grammar and vocabulary provide a **semantic range** of possibilities; interpretive tradition, theological context, and authorial intent considerations determine which possibility translators select. Your proposed rendering represents one end of that lexically allowable spectrum, emphasizing etymological and grammatical literalism over interpretive theological tradition.

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